

Contaminants' health risk called small

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South Plainfield residents who live near the Hamilton Industrial Park face little risk from harmful contaminants, federal officials said last night.

SOUTH PLAINFIELD

High levels of lead, cadmium and polychlorinated biphenyls on the 25-acre property on Hamilton Boulevard pose a health threat only to those who have worked at the site for at least 10 years, according to Artie Block, of the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Diseases Registry.

Block and other federal officials met with the Taxpayers Advisory Group last night to

provide information on contamination at the industrial park owned by D.S.C. of Newark Enterprises.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency targeted the site for cleanup under the Superfund program after finding high levels of contaminants in soil samples inside seven of 15 businesses located there and in sediments of the Bound Brook, which flows across the property.

Tainted airborne dust particles that travel from the site would be too dilute to pose a threat to residents, said Eric Wilson, who is coordinating EPA efforts at the site.

"We don't have any information to say there is any risk beyond the site," Wilson said.

Workers at the site should take some

steps to reduce their exposure to contaminants, Block said. To reduce their risk, business owners and workers at the site have been advised to wash their hands frequently, to leave their work clothes on the job and to wipe their shoes before returning home, Block said.

The agency is now in the process of deciding whether the site meets the criteria for placement on the National Priorities List, through which it would qualify for a more extensive, longterm cleanup, Wilson said.

A preliminary assessment of the site indicates that it meets the minimal criteria required for placement on the list, said Joe

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Rotola, who heads the Removal Action section of the EPA.

Gov. Christie Whitman has sent a letter to the EPA endorsing its placement of the site on the national list, according to Wilson, who said that a final decision has yet to be made.

In the meantime, Wilson said the EPA will begin environmental testing this month to determine whether contaminants have traveled along the Bound Brook to New Market Pond in Piscataway.

Wilson said the agency also will test some nearby residential areas to determine whether contaminants have migrated off the site.

The agency tested air samples yesterday inside some of the businesses and along a contaminated dirt roadway on the property, Wilson said.

Wilson said the EPA has ordered D.S.C. to pave a dirt roadway on the property, put up fences and to institute engineering controls to prevent tainted runoff from leaving the site.

Frank Cornell, a member of the Taxpayers Advisory Group, said residents have been given inadequate information about the status of the site. Wilson said the agency will hold a public meeting June 19 to answer questions.